

Carbon Monoxide

What are the symptoms of CO (carbon monoxide) poisoning?

Carbon monoxide is difficult to detect because it is a colorless, odorless gas. It is possible to miss the symptoms of CO poisoning because they are similar to that of having the flu. Because CO problems are the worst when we close up our houses to stay warm, winter is the most common time for both ailments and their symptoms include headaches, dizziness, fatigue, reddening of the skin, and nausea. These symptoms tend to become less pronounced when warmer weather and spring arrive. Severe CO poisoning can lead to unconsciousness, neurological damage, and eventually death. As with so many health conditions, the very young, the elderly, and those suffering from other health challenges are at higher risk.

Where does carbon monoxide come from?

CO is a product of incomplete combustion of any fuel source. This includes flame heaters, oil and gas burners, gas stoves and ovens, wood stoves, fireplaces, flame grills, and other non-electric appliances, as well as running engines in garaged cars or generators. It can also get into your home from a leaky chimney or back draft.

What can I do to protect my family from carbon monoxide?

There are several simple steps that you can take to protect your family from this hazard. At the beginning of each heating season check your dwelling for CO safety: Install carbon monoxide detectors and check that they are working properly. Smoke detectors will not detect CO and carbon monoxide detectors will not alert you to smoke and fire, so both are needed. Check the combustion of any flame or fuel burning appliances. If you do not know how to be sure that your appliances and engines are running cleanly, bring in a knowledgeable professional to check them. Be sure all sources of fuel burning (appliances and engines) are properly ventilated. Check to be sure that the ventilation is functioning properly. Do not let cars idle inside the garage for extended periods of time. If you suspect a CO hazard, remove the family from the area until you can better determine if there is a problem, and how to solve it. Often opening windows and doors can temporarily relieve a carbon monoxide problem. If you have a CO problem, and anyone is displaying symptoms of CO poisoning, contact emergency response (911) and get them medical examination and treatment.

Is more information available?

You can visit the following web site(s) for more information:

US Environmental Protection Agency
<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/co.html>

American Lung Association
<http://www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLUK9O0E&b=35375>

If Nassau County residents have additional questions or concerns regarding Carbon Monoxide in their dwelling, they can call the NC Department of Health – Residential Environment Unit (516-227-9686).